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SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA, NEA/MAG AND IO/UNP

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/16/2018

TAGS: PREL PBTS UN AG WI MO

SUBJECT: FASSI FIHRI CONVOKES PERM 5 PLUS SPAIN TO COMPLAIN  
ABOUT VAN WALSUM'S OUSTER AND PRESS FOR HARSTON'S RECALL

REF: RABAT 0832 (NOTAL)

Classified By: Ambassador Thomas T. Riley for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) On September 16, Moroccan Foreign Minister Taieb Fassi Fihri convoked the Permanent 5 Ambassadors and Charges, plus the Spanish Ambassador, to bemoan the way in which Peter Van Walsum, the UNSYG's former Personal Envoy for the Western Sahara, was treated by the UN and to press for MINURSO Head of Mission Julian Harstons recall. The Minister focused on the GOM view that whoever replaces Van Walsum should build on the last UN Security Council Resolution on Western Sahara and the progress made by the former Personal Envoy. Distributing copies of correspondence between Van Walsum and Ban Ki-moon, King Mohammed VI and Ban, and Fassi Fihri and Ban (which have been e-mailed to NEA/MAG), the Foreign Minister explained Morocco's belief that Algerian pressure had led to Van Walsum's forced resignation. Fassi Fihri spent most of the 90-minute meeting complaining about the process and the lack of consultation. He lamented learning about Van Walsum's resignation from the Algerian press on August 21.

¶2. (C) Fassi Fihri's September 1 letter to Ban sums up the discussion, noting three key points:

-- "the abrupt interruption of the efforts of Mr. Van Walsum has set an unwelcome precedent;"  
-- "Morocco's commitment to the pursuit of its engagement in this (Manhasset) process would be contingent on the preservation of the progress achieved under Mr. Van Walsum;" and  
-- "Mr. Julian Harston no longer enjoys the confidence and support extended to him by the Government of His Majesty the King ( (since) the actions of Mr. Harston have exposed increasing insensitiveness (sic) to the very basic principles of diplomatic courtesy and impartiality."

¶3. (C) In a September 11 letter from Ban to Fassi Fihri, the UNSYG assured the Minister that he intended to revitalize efforts to find a solution and to consult widely to prepare for a fifth round of talks in Manhasset.

¶4. (C) Comment: This briefing for the Perm 5 plus Spain confirmed what Fassi Fihri's Chief of Staff had told us almost two weeks ago (Reftel). It also made public the GOM's lack of confidence in Harston. We understand that the GOM has conveyed this to Harston. We note that the Minister made no mention of Christopher Ross nomination, which has been reported in local and Spanish media, citing GOM sources. End comment.

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Riley